DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 413 467 CE 075 071

AUTHOR Glass, Jennifer
TITLE Do Mothers Stay on the Job? What Employers Can Do To Increase Retention after Childbirth. Research-in-Brief.
INSTITUTION Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 1996-03-00
NOTE 6p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Birth; Career Development; *Employed Women; *Employment Patterns; *Employment Practices; *Labor Turnover; *Mothers

ABSTRACT

According to a recent study of how women manage maternity in the workplace, more than 70% of pregnant employees were still employed at the same job 6 months after childbirth (compared to 80% of young women who had not been pregnant). A study of 324 randomly selected employed women in the Midwest yielded similar results. Six months after giving birth, 72% percent of the women had returned to work with the same employer, 11% were working for a different employer, and only 17% had not returned to work. Of the managers and professionals, only 11% did not return to the jobs they held before their pregnancy. Other findings of these studies were as follows: employer accommodations to pregnant workers played a significant role in producing high retention figures; total length of child-bearing leave and ability to avoid excessive work hours (over 40 per week), show strong and consistent effects on employee retention; women who considered their supervisors indifferent or hostile to their needs were more likely to change jobs or exit the labor force; and women who believed that employment does not adversely affect the mother-child relationship were less likely to exit the labor force after childbirth. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 413 467

Do Mothers Stay on the Job?
What Employers Can Do to Increase Retention after Childbirth
Research-in-Brief

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Brewster

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CE075071

Do Mothers Stay on the Job?

What Employers Can Do to Increase Retention after Childbirth

Since 1989, when Felice Schwartz created a furor with her "Mommy Track" piece in the pages of the *Harvard Business Review* (Schwartz, 1989), two things have become abundantly clear:

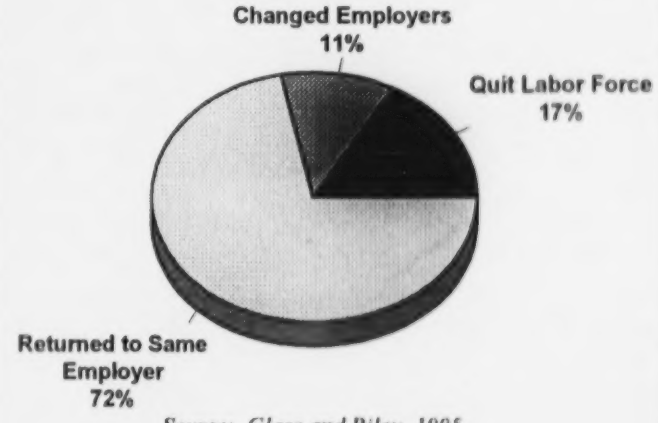
- the growth in employment among mothers of infants and toddlers shows no signs of stopping or reversing itself (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1992)
- the U.S. is in the midst of a baby "boomlet" as the baby boomers continue to have their postponed children while younger cohorts start their childbearing years earlier than the baby boomers did (Rindfuss, 1991).

So just how far have we come in our understanding of how to manage maternity in the workplace? Fortunately, two recent studies shed light on many of the mistaken assumptions and open questions about the behavior of employed women who become pregnant. Researchers at the RAND Corporation have been closely following the employment decisions of young women who became pregnant in the cohort of women born between 1957 and 1965 (Klerman and Leibowitz, 1995). Another research team has been working with a smaller Midwestern sample of 324 employed pregnant women randomly selected from hospital records in 1991-92 (Glass and Riley, 1995).

LOW TURNOVER AFTER CHILDBIRTH

Perhaps the most surprising but consistent finding is that the problem of turnover among pregnant employees is far less serious than previously believed. In both studies, ***over seventy percent of pregnant employees were still employed at the same job six months following childbirth.*** This compares quite favorably to the eighty percent retention rate reported for young women who did not have a child over the same period in the RAND study. Figure 1 shows data for the Midwestern sample: at six months after childbirth, 72 percent had returned to work with the same employer, an additional eleven percent had returned to work but with a different employer, and fewer than one-fifth (17 percent) had not yet returned to work and could be considered to have left the labor

Figure 1. Status of Employed Pregnant Women at Six Months Postpartum Total Sample, n=308

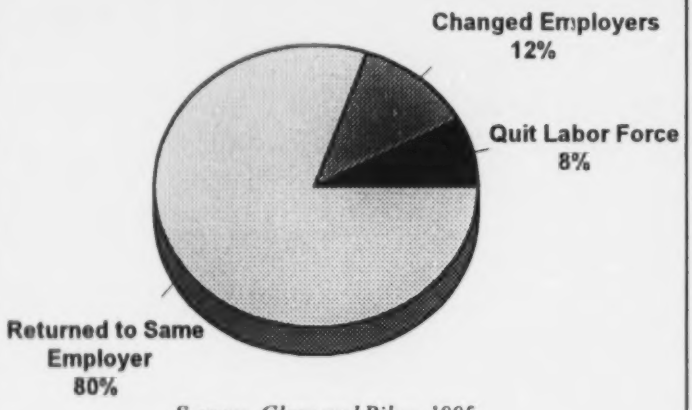


Source: Glass and Riley, 1995.

force. In sum, the turnover rate for pregnant employees in the 1990s is not much higher than the "normal" turnover rate for young women.

When the focus is turned toward only managers and professionals, the turnover issue practically becomes moot. Only seven of 111 employed managers and professionals in the Midwestern sample were still out of the labor force at six months postpartum, and only 11 of the rest had changed jobs from their pre-pregnancy employment (Figure 2). While the media have bombarded us with images of mothers trading briefcases for babies, careful assessment of what is really happening reveals that ***managers and professionals are the least likely of all women employees to leave the labor force following childbirth***. This occurs in large part because they have the most to lose from labor force withdrawals (high wages, accumulated seniority, future raises, and promotion possibilities), but also because they tend to have the best working conditions and benefits that enable them to combine employment and parenting.

Figure 2. Status of Employed Pregnant Women at Six Months Postpartum Managers and Professionals, n=111



Source: Glass and Riley, 1995.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO

Lest it appear that the problem of turnover following childbirth does not really exist, it is vital to note that ***employer accommodations to pregnant workers play a significant role in producing high retention figures***. In the Midwestern study, employer practices were divided into three categories --

- those that allowed women to reduce their work hours;
- those that gave them increased schedule flexibility; and
- those that provided workplace social support, whether that be child care assistance, the ability to leave in case of emergency, or assistance from supervisors or coworkers when family issues arose.

Analysis of the data shows that ***policies in the hours reduction and social support categories produce the strongest effects on retention.***

Reduce Hours

Regarding hours reduction, both ***the total length of childbearing leave and the ability to avoid excessive work hours (over 40 per week) show strong and consistent effects on employee retention***. In fact, these two policies produced stronger effects on retention than any of the other policies studied. The ability to avoid overtime was particularly important for managers and professionals and was one of the few variables to show any effects on this group.

Provide Social Support

Under the heading of social support, the most important deterrents to turnover were the attitudes of supervisors and coworkers. ***Women who felt their supervisor was indifferent or hostile to their needs were statistically more likely to change jobs or exit the labor force, even after controlling for the effects of wages and other job characteristics***. Moreover, a small but significant fraction of mothers in the Midwestern sample (eight percent) returned to their pre-pregnancy jobs following birth but later changed employers before their infants were a year old. This suggests that some companies provide incentives that induce swift returns to work, but do not provide ongoing support for mothers who plan to stay in the labor force.

Flextime Widespread, But Relatively Ineffective

Finally, evidence suggests that the presence of any form of schedule flexibility increased retention, although the effect was small. Schedule flexibility was the most commonly reported employer accommodation to childbearing (flextime was available to over 40 percent of the sample, for example). Unfortunately, it was not the most effective in reducing turnover.

OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF JOB COMMITTED WORKERS

Evidence from the midwestern study also suggests that several individual and job attributes also contribute to retention. High wages and interesting or challenging work discouraged job quitting following childbirth. Workers' job tenure was also important--the longer the tenure, the less likely the employee was to leave. However, employee's feeling about employed mothers produced the largest effect of all the personal characteristics studied. ***Women who believe that employed mothers can have just as good a relationship with their children as nonemployed mothers are significantly less likely to exit the labor force following childbirth.***

SUMMARY

As it turns out, Felice Schwartz had the right prescription but the wrong diagnosis - childbearing women do need longer parenting leaves, less overtime, and social support in the workplace, but ***not*** because they lack commitment to their employers or are likely to withdraw from high quality jobs in which they have made substantial investments. In the final analysis, two points need to be remembered about managing maternity in the workplace: (1) the problem is not as severe as many imagine, particularly among managers and professionals, and retention problems can probably be remedied by encouraging employers to provide longer leaves, workloads that can be handled in a 40 hour week, and supervisor training in the provision of support to childbearing employees; and (2) a small minority of women employees will have strong ideological reasons for staying home with their infants that may override attempts to retain them. The evidence shows, however, that most women who quit after childbirth are leaving jobs that do not accommodate their needs or pay wages so low that they have little to lose by quitting and looking for a different job in the future.

Written by: Jennifer Glass
University of Iowa
Formatted by: Jill Braunstein
Institute for Women's Policy Research
(202) 785-5100

March 1996

REFERENCES

Glass, Jennifer and Lisa Riley. 1995. "Family Responsive Policies and Turnover Among Childbearing Women." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Population Association of America, San Francisco, CA.

Klerman, Jacob A. and Arleen Leibowitz. 1995. "Employment Continuity Among New Mothers." RAND Working Paper, Santa Monica, CA.

Rindfuss, Ronald. 1991. "The Young Adult Years: Diversity, Structural Changes and Fertility." *Demography* 28:493-512.

Schwartz, Felice. 1989. "Management Women and the New Facts of Life." *Harvard Business Review*, January-February, pp. 65-76.

U.S. Bureau of the Census. 1992. *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992* (112th Edition). Washington, D.C.

(over for note)

ABOUT THIS RESEARCH IN BRIEF

This Research-in-Brief is the first in a series designed to bring pertinent research findings produced by scholars and others located across the United States to the attention of the Institute for Women's Policy Research audience. Researchers at universities and other instituations are invited to write up their results in a short form suitable for a broad and diverse audience. Jerry Jacobs (University of Pennsylvania), Barbara Reskin (Ohio State University), Paula England (University of Arizona), and Ronnie Steinberg (Temple University) serve as the editorial review committee for this series. Contact Jill Braunstein at IWPR for more information.

Support for the research on which this Research-In-Brief is based was provided by National Science Foundation grant no. SES90-23475 and by the Center for Public Policy at the University of Iowa. An extended version of this paper can be found in Compensation and Benefits Management, Winter, 1996. *For further information, please contact Jennifer Glass, Department of Sociology, University of Iowa, phone: 319/335-3745, fax: 319/335-2509, e-mail: Jennifer-Glass@uiowa.edu.*

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) is an independent, nonprofit research institute dedicated to conducting and disseminating research that informs public policy debates affecting women. Members of the Institute receive regular mailing including fact sheets such as this. Individual memberships begin at $40.00. Organizational memberships are also available. Contact the Institute at 202/785-5100, fax us at 202/833-4362, write us, or visit our web site at http://www.iwpr.org for more information.